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SOVIET CHALLENGES POPE PLOT CHARGE

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MOSCOW, May 24 — The Soviet Union announced today that it had created what it called a Committee for the Defense of Sergei I. Antonov, the Bulgarian who is to go on trial in Rome on Monday on a charge of plotting to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981.

The committee appeared to be modeled after a Bulgarian group that was created in March. The Bulgarian group has called the case a contrivance by the Central Intelligence Agency.

As Mr. Antonov's trial has drawn near, the Soviet press has printed articles saying the former Bulgarian official was being framed by Western secret services as part of a campaign to smear the Eastern bloc nations.

The press has published articles accusing the United States of what it calls "state terrorism." United States actions in Grenada, Nicaragua and the Middle East are drawn together under this heading.

The newly formed Soviet committee includes representatives of trade unions, organizations of women and youth and workers in the fields of culture, science and art, as well as lawyers, medical professionals and representatives of the clergy, according to the official press agency, Tass.

Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turk, is serving a life term for the shooting on May 13, 1981. Mr. Agca first said he operated alone. He later provided information that led to conspiracy indictments against three Bulgarians, including Mr. Antonov, a former manager of the Bulgarian national airline's Rome office. Mr. Antonov is accused of helping to plan the shooting. The two other Bulgarians charged, who left Italy before Mr. Antonov was arrested, will be tried in absentia.

The Antonov committee is headed by Vladimir Karpov, chief editor of the journal Novy Mir.

In recent articles, the Soviet press has said the charges against Mr. Antonov were "a frame-up" based on "false testimony" by Mr. Agca. Mr. Agca was said to have been "masterminded by agents of Italian security services on instructions from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency."

A recent series of articles in the Government daily, Izvestia, described Mr. Agca as a professional terrorist who had worked for "neo-Fascist" organizations.

The newspaper said the allegation that he conspired with Bulgarian agents was a "provocation cooked up by the Western secret services" and added that "there is nothing astonishing" in his reported travels through Bulgaria. "Hundreds of thousands of Turkish citizens do that," Izvestia said.

The newspaper said it seemed strange that Mr. Agca had traveled freely in Italy even though the international police network Interpol had distributed his photograph. It hinted at a Vatican connection in his actions.

"The view is widespread among Turkish journalists in Rome that there were people among the Vatican top crust who had a stake in the physical removal of Pope John Paul II," Izvestia said.

It said that the Pope, being Polish rather than Italian, "went against the grain" of the Vatican establishment.